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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY USSR

SUBJECT Port and Harbor Facilities at Mezen

PLACE ACQUIRED  
(BY SOURCE)DATE ACQUIRED  
(BY SOURCE)

DATE (OF INFO.)

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1. Mezen is a lumber exporting port. The only modern equipment noticed was US-made "Ross Carriers," for the handling of lumber. Two pontoon wharves, one under construction, located at Kamenka, about four miles north of Mezen. No storage or warehouse facilities. A Port "Commissioner" handles all business dealings and is in charge of port security. A large amount of air activity noted in area. Lumber for export brought to Mezen by barge from hinterland.

## 2. Port Facilities

Mezen is located on the Mezen River, last of the entrances to the White Sea, at Lat 65° 52' N, Long 44° 17' E. There are no storage facilities at Mezen. A dirt road leads from the river bank up a hill to high level ground. There are a few stores and houses are located and where lumber is stacked awaiting shipment. Ships loading and unloading do so at Kamenka, a small sawmill town about four miles north of Mezen. This anchorage will hold about five ships the size of four or five thousand tons. A very good lay-holding ground was encountered here. Telephone and telegraph facilities were available.

## 3. Harbor - Entrance and Approaches

According to source, he departed Angersund on 15 May 53 and arrived off Morjovets Island (Morzhovets Island) on 25 May 53, where he became icebound for four days, finally entering the mouth of the Mezen River on 29 May 53. Source stated that he requested permission to pass north of Morjovets Island to avoid ice, but was denied permission. No ice breakers were observed in the area during the time he was icebound in the narrow strait between Morjovets Island and the mainland. Source said he repeated radio calls brought no answer. A few huts were observed on Morjovets Island, but no people were sighted.

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4. Because of the 14' tide in the Mezen River, it can be entered only at high tide, which lasts ten hours, ebb tide lasting only two hours, due to the narrowness of the river and the very steep banks bordering it. Navigational aids were stated to be very poor, both in the approaches to the Mezen River and in proceeding up the river. The channel is very narrow, barely wide enough to allow two ships to pass, and is marked by stakes or posts. There were very few lighted channel markers, but, source stated, the lack of lighted markers was of no concern because of the 24 hour daylight encountered at this latitude. No dredging or channel improvement was noted, nor were bridges or cables encountered. The river was estimated to be one half to one mile wide and very shallow, even at high tide. Source added that he believed the river downstream from Mezen must be almost dry at low tide.
5. A pilot was taken aboard at the mouth of the Mezen River, and he remained aboard until source's ship left the Mezen River. The pilot boat was described only as a very modern, diesel-powered craft.

#### 6. Landing Facilities

There are no permanent quays, piers or docks due to the huge tides, strong currents and ice conditions. The only landing facilities whatsoever consisted of two pontoon wharves secured in a parallel position to the shore by heavy chains and cables. Each wharf can load two ships at one time. These wharves are placed in the water in the spring and taken up in the fall. One wharf was completed and one under construction during the time source's ship was in port.

#### 7. Port Administration

The port seemed to be under the complete control of a Port "Commissioner," with whom all business dealings were handled. Upon the arrival of source's ship, this Commissioner, a civilian clothes, boarded the ship with 25 or 30 uniformed men who searched the ship thoroughly, went through the personal effects of the men, and in the case of the Captain, read all his mail, particularly those letters written in English. The Commissioner was the only one who spoke English. Upon completion of the search, the crew of source's ship were given passes and permitted to go ashore at will; however, inasmuch as the village of Mezen was approximately four miles from the port, few men wandered out of sight of the ship, few of them willing to risk seizure. "Lorries" which appeared to be US-made autos of pre-World War II vintage, were available for transportation. No supplies or services of any kind were available. Source evidenced genuine surprise at the modern lumber-handling equipment there, mentioning in particular the very high, US-made automotive type vehicle which can straddle and lift a large pile of lumber at one time (Ross Carriers). These vehicles were present in goodly supply and carried the lumber from the large storage area on the high ground overlooking the anchorage, down the sharp incline to the loading pier.

8. Source stated further that during the time he was tied up at the pier, about ten uniformed men, or police, walked continuously up and down the pier, while one man stood watch at his gangway; and regardless of the number of times the Russian men loading the lumber used the gangway, each and every time they had to identify themselves to this guard, although obviously from the conversations that ensued these workmen were close friends of the guard. Other than these armed guards, no other police or soldiers were seen by source, nor did he see any evidences of military preparations, defenses, etc. Source did state, and emphasized very strongly, there was a great amount of air activity in the area. A very considerable number of aircraft, large

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- multi-engine craft as well as single-engine types, were noted, although no jet-type craft were present at any time. According to source, these planes seemed to come from an airport perhaps five miles east of Mezen, in the area near Lake Okladrikovo. Source added he did not visit in that area, but the aircraft appeared to come from that area and were noted to lose altitude and circle that area, apparently preparatory to landing.
9. Source stated he did not leave the general vicinity of the port, and did not visit the City of Mezen, but that he saw no railroads and no roads other than those used in the port area, the latter being unimproved dirt type; no pipelines were seen. Source's ship carried no cargo into Mezen; outbound she carried lumber to England; all ships in Mezen at the time were loaded with lumber. While at Mezen, source stated two or three very old wood or coal burning Soviet tugs were noted bringing lumber-laden barges down river from the hinterland; these were only tugs seen in port and none were available or used for assisting ships while there.
10. Source stated that while sailing toward Mezen and in the vicinity of Murmansk he sighted two Soviet cruisers firing on a target being towed by a smaller craft. He could not enlarge on this statement in any way, other than that he knew they were Soviet cruisers.

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